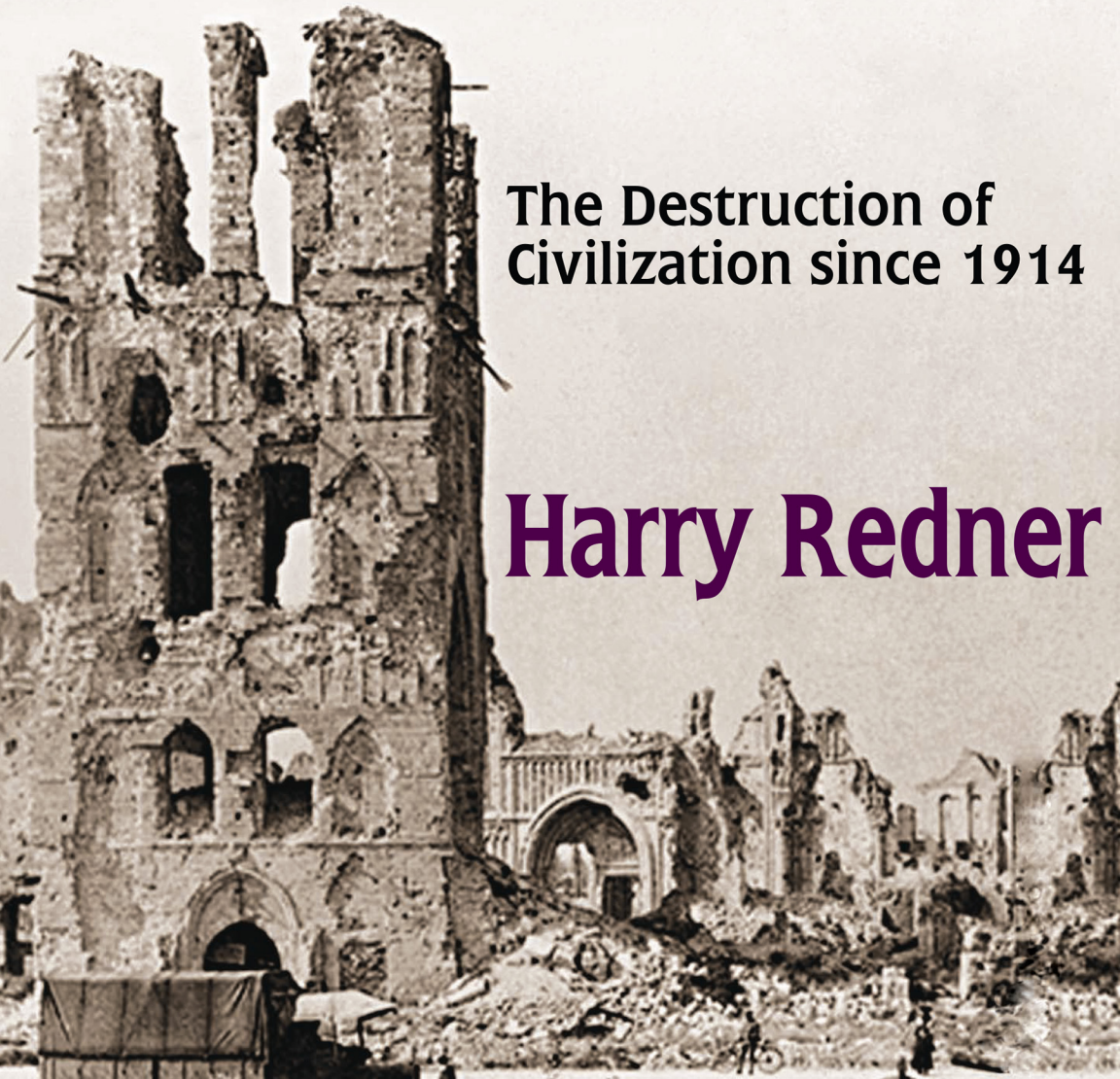


Totalitarianism, Globalization, Colonialism

**The Destruction of
Civilization since 1914**

Harry Redner



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Introduction

A century after the start of the First World War, we can reflect on the changes to civilization in the period from 1914 to 2014, which we will call the twentieth century for purposes of historical analysis. The Great War released a flood of events that engulfed Europe first, then the rest of the world, and gave rise to one of the most traumatic centuries in human history. At times in this period, humanity itself came close to the abyss, in ways never possible before the advent of weapons of mass destruction. In sheer numerical terms it was the most bloody century in history; and even if the loss of life is measured in proportion to the total human population, it still ranks close to the top, perhaps exceeded only by the Mongol depredations in the thirteenth century.¹ For sheer slaughter, the first half of the century, 1914 to 1964, has rarely, if ever, been surpassed. It is true that in the next half-century calm was to a considerable extent restored, with only the occasional mass murder, usually in an out-of-the-way place. Perhaps mankind realized how close it had come to perdition just as the half-century was closing and recoiled from further killing. For the present, the danger of nuclear holocaust has receded, though it has not been completely removed.

However, our main interest is not in recounting the horrors of our time; rather, it is in examining their effects on civilization, a subject that is seldom addressed. These might have been much worse than in fact they were. A different outcome to the Second World War, an even greater catastrophe than the First, might have spelled a grave setback for civilization. If Hitler had won the war in the East, as he came within an ace of doing, Europe would have been under Nazi totalitarian domination for far longer than it actually was. Since America was likely to have developed nuclear weapons first, it would probably have used them to devastate Germany, with horrendous consequences for

European civilization in general. A similar outcome can be envisaged if, due to some quirk in weather or other mischance, D-day had failed and the Allies had been unable to land in Europe in time to prevent Stalin from overrunning the whole of Germany and most of Western Europe as well.² This, too, would probably have led to nuclear war and the utter ruination of Europe and other parts of the world.

All in all, it was “a damn close run thing”—to paraphrase the Duke of Wellington—that civilization survived beyond the twentieth century. And the danger has not passed. Disasters can still ensue from many quarters, whether through wars or environmental catastrophes or incurable diseases, or other still unsuspected calamities. However, these are not the issue with which we are concerned in this book. Our interest is not with what might have happened or what could potentially happen, but merely with what actually happened. Our aim is not to pursue some “end-of-civilization” thesis, the kind usually proffered in vatic tones fit for parody, in which whatever the writer happens to fear or loathe is set down as boding “the end of civilization as we know it.” No such end-of-civilization thesis is entertained here.

The destruction of civilization with which we are concerned is an extended and enduring historical process with no foreseeable end. It is a slow withering away that could go on, cease, or reverse itself—we have no way of predicting in the long run which it will be. Best described as a de-civilizing process, it developed with frightening rapidity in the twentieth century and seems set to continue well into the twenty-first, for no countermovement is as yet discernible. We might hope for such a reversal, and we are duty bound to work for it, but we have no grounds for assuming it will necessarily occur. Civilization is now in the balance for the very first time in human history. How this balance tips will depend on the aspirations and unpredictable actions of future generations. All we can do is seek to influence them by safeguarding what is left of the civilization we inherited from our predecessors. Communication between the generations, as we pass on old and recent traditions, is clearly our key responsibility.

Among the relatively more recent traditions that are crucial for the future survival of civilization are those of the Enlightenment, as the outstanding historian Eric Hobsbawm declared: “I believe that one of the few things that stands between us and an accelerated descent into darkness is the set of values inherited from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.”³ In a brief lecture delivered late in his life, Hobsbawm spells out what he means by “darkness,” which he also calls “barbarism,”

utilizing the traditional terminology deriving from the fall of the classical civilization that, as we will show, is not altogether appropriate:

The argument of this lecture is that, after about 150 years of secular decline, barbarism has been on the increase for most of the twentieth century. In this respect I understand “barbarism” to mean two things. First, the disruption and breakdown of the system of rules and moral behavior by which *all* societies regulate the relations among their members and, to a lesser extent, between their members and those of other societies. Second, I mean, more specifically, the reverse of what we may call the project of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, namely, the establishment of a universal system of such rules and standards of moral behavior, embodied in the institution of states dedicated to the rational progress of humanity.⁴

In defining “barbarism,” Hobsbawm has in effect also offered a cursory definition of its opposite, namely, civilization. In this view, which we share, civilization in modern times is primarily a matter of “the system of rules and moral behavior” and of “the rational progress of humanity”; or, putting it in a nutshell, of ethics and rationality, which, as we will show, are closely bound up with standards of higher literacy. It is, therefore, mainly in respect of ethics, rationality, and higher literacy that we need to assess the extent of the destruction of civilization in the twentieth century.

The first decisive event in this process of withering away was undoubtedly the First World War. Hobsbawm, like many others, sees this as the opening of the gates of hell:

We may need to explain why nineteenth-century civilization did not recover from the First World War, as many expected it to do. But we know it didn't. It entered upon an age of catastrophe: of wars followed by social revolutions, of the end of empires, of the collapse of the liberal world economy, the steady retreat of constitutional and democratic governments, the rise of Fascism and Nazism. That civilization receded is not very surprising, especially when we consider that the period ended in the greatest school of barbarism of all, the Second World War.⁵

It is also not surprising that Hobsbawm is circumspect rather than forthright about one of the main causes of why civilization did not recover: the Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia and the resultant spread of Leninist-Marxism, for Hobsbawm himself and countless other intellectuals like him were lifelong devoted Marxists. This was the

beginning of the age of totalitarianism of which Fascism and Nazism were alternate expressions. The Second World War, the descent into the lowest circles of hell, developed into the conflict between these two antagonistic forms of totalitarianism, Bolshevism and Nazism. It is essential to ask why thinkers like Hobsbawm should have espoused an ideology such as Bolshevism—as others espoused Nazism—and remained loyal to it. The commitment of intellectuals to devastatingly destructive ideologies remains a mystery; nevertheless, we will seek to elucidate it later in this work. Hobsbawm provides few clues as to this matter. However, he does outline the sequence of stages during which the de-civilizing process took place:

I will now suggest a brief chronology of this slide down the slope of barbarization. The main stages are four: the First World War, the period of world crisis from the breakdown of 1917–20 to that of 1944–7, the four decades of the Cold War era, and lastly, the general breakdown of civilization as we know it over large parts of the world in and since the 1980s. There is an obvious continuity between the first three stages. In each of the earlier, lessons of man's inhumanity to man were learned and became the basis of new advances in barbarism.⁶

In this work we will refer to these first three stages as the *Events of the Twentieth Century*, and we will relate them to totalitarianism. This is the first of the main topics in our title, and we will devote most attention to it in the first part of the work. The fourth stage, that following the 1980s, we will discuss under the general heading of globalization, which is the second of the topics in the title and it will feature most prominently in the second part of this book. The third topic, that of colonialism, does not occur in Hobsbawm's brief summation, except perhaps implicitly in the phrase "the end of empires," which must refer to the de-colonialization that followed on the prior epoch of colonialism. We will explore how colonialism figured in the destruction of civilization in the third part of this work when we consider the fate of the non-Western civilizations, which Hobsbawm completely overlooked. Taken together, totalitarianism, globalization, and colonialism constitute the basic terms of our historical explanation for the ongoing destruction of civilization in the twentieth century.

Hobsbawm's assertion that with the destruction of civilization we are entering into a renewed state of barbarism certainly sounds odd. Barbarism is generally considered to be the state prior to civilization, one that ensues when a civilization collapses materially and organiza-

tionally and lapses back into what used to be called “savagery”—namely, a simpler state of social existence like that of tribalism or even feudalism. But clearly this is not what is happening in the world at present, and certainly not in Europe or America. There has been no material decline; on the contrary, Europe as well as America and many other parts of the world have entered into a state of general material affluence never before experienced in history. And the same holds true of their level of organization and social well-being; law and order is perhaps more prevalent than ever, personal security as well as individual rights have never been as safeguarded; democracy is spreading all over the world; literacy is almost universal; and information of every type is freely available. What we have elsewhere termed the Forces of Modernity—namely, industrial capitalism, the bureaucratic state, modern science, and technology—are responsible for these major advances, which most people consider to be progress.⁷ Does this not also amount to an advance of civilization?

There are many thinkers who believe that it does; indeed, they hold that we now live in an advanced civilization that they call global or technological civilization, for it is one that spans the whole world, and it is based on the new technologies that enable rapid transportation and almost instant communication throughout the globe. Everywhere the same or very similar conditions obtain in respect of all major factors of importance in current conditions of human life. Whatever still distinguishes people from each other now seems secondary and of far less importance. Mostly, of course, these are the cultural, social, and individual differences that still exist and have not yet been completely eliminated. Is this, then, the brave new world toward which civilization has been steadily progressing, or is it something quite other that follows from the steady retreat from civilization to which Hobsbawm refers? Whatever it is, it is not barbarism. In our prior work we have called it a state beyond civilization or a condition of postcivilization.⁸

What we mean by this paradoxical designation will become clearer once we provide a theoretically adequate definition of civilization. The word itself is etymologically of Latin origin and did not come into use until the eighteenth century, first in its French form; but the idea behind it is as old as Classical civilization itself. In its root meaning it refers to the city (*civis* in Latin, *polis* in Greek), the locus of civilization, but not so much to the urban infrastructure itself, as to the way of life carried on within it by its citizens. This style of living came to be designated as civil or civilized. This idea was then transferred from

its classical sources to analogous forms in numerous localities, during various ages, which also came to be called civilizations. However, many of these were not based on cities but on courts, which is a key marker in separating Western from Eastern civilizations.

Historically speaking we can also distinguish early and usually long-lasting civilizations, such as Sumer and Egypt, from later more developed ones, such as Greece, China, India, and eventually the Christian and Islamic ones. The difference between them is not merely a matter of chronology, for civilizations that arose very late, such as the pre-Columbian ones in America, are very like the early ones in the Old World. Rather, the main differentiating factor is whether a civilization derives from the breakthroughs of the Axial Age, a term devised by the philosopher Karl Jaspers to describe the key turning point of human history. It generally refers to the period between 700 and 300 BC approximately, and more specifically to the time around about 500 BC, when many of the most revered thinkers, prophets, and sages were near contemporaries: Pythagoras, Deutero-Isaiah, the Buddha, Confucius, and possibly Zoroaster as well, though his dating is uncertain.⁹ It is from these that the philosophies, ethical systems, and religions that are still extant and current throughout the world derive.

The advanced civilizations of the world were founded directly or indirectly during the Axial Age based on the canonic texts, then devised and passed on in written form down the ages. It is these books that define for us the meaning of civilization. Civilization is primarily the forms of acting, thinking, and feeling adumbrated by these different traditions, and the subsequent developments based on them. Whatever else is needed to maintain a civilized form of life is secondary; this includes the material infrastructure of economic production, political organization, techniques of every description, and even scientific knowledge of a purely pragmatic kind—though not the theories themselves, for these are part of humanity's rational enlightenment. Civilization is primarily a matter of culture in the normative sense of that word, as when we speak of someone being cultured. There are cognate terms in all European languages, such as "kulturny" in Russian.

As Hobsbawm indicated, the civilization of the West is founded on a culture of ethics and rationality based on high literacy. This had its origins in Greek philosophy, Roman law, and Judaic monotheism. It developed into what is now commonly called the Judeo-Christian European civilization or the West for short, though that term can also be used for the whole sequence of Occidental civilizations, the Classi-

cal Greek and Roman, the Byzantine, and the European. The West, in both these senses, gave rise to a complex syncretic ethical system, in which a number of diverse components interact.¹⁰ This was conjoined with numerous forms of rationality, which incorporated abstract theory and were couched in philosophic, scientific, and mathematical modes of representation.¹¹ From these two sets of features, which were more developed in the West than in any of its coeval civilizations, the culture of Modernity arose during the period of Renaissance and Reformation approximately and became the necessary precursor to our contemporary condition of globalization. The Enlightenment, whose passing Hobsbawm mourns, was the intermediate stage between early Modernity and our postcivilizational age. It will be our task to explain how this epochal transition took place and what agencies brought it about.

We can begin to understand what distinguishes civilization from postcivilization when we study the contrasting nature of literacy in both. Civilization is based on the high literacy of classical or canonic texts that embody the knowledge and wisdom of its culture and its fundamental beliefs—that is, both its rational and ethical norms. In the case of the West, these were incarnate in the first place in the works of the philosophers and prophets, or to be more specific in Plato and Aristotle, the Bible, and St. Paul. Later, all kinds of other foundational texts were added to these, such as the work of great poets, dramatists, and novelists, and in modern times also the works of natural philosophers or scientists like Newton and Darwin. All such texts used to play a basic role in education, and nobody would have been considered educated—that is, civilized—who was not knowledgeable about them, at least to some degree. This was the mark of civility, facilitating intelligent conversation and letter-writing. Depending on their education and ability, people obviously attained different levels of excellence in this respect, but it represented an ideal for all.

The decline of high literacy in our time is a striking symptom of the onset of a postcivilizational condition. Best described by the German term *Bildung*, literacy on this level is disappearing, even if it has not yet completely vanished. There is, of course, an almost universal literacy, which has never before been present in any society; this achievement, however, masks the fact that basic literacy involves a generally low level of comprehension. Everybody can read, but what most people choose to read is of questionable value. Certainly, the classical and canonic texts are hardly read or, if read, only perfunctorily by students having to satisfy examination requirements. Even standards of literacy

in popular reading matter have fallen drastically over the course of the twentieth century. If we compare any newspaper, public address, popular novel, or piece of literature from before the First World War with present-day texts, we see a huge disparity in the literacy demanded by works from these different periods. Apart from print media, the other types of media, such as film, radio, TV, video, and even the Internet, require only moderate literacy, as they are based on electronic sound and image. Reliance on them has led to the impoverishment of education and to mass stupefaction, as the sociological studies of Benjamin Barber demonstrate.¹²

How can one speak of “civilization” under such circumstances? And yet this is what many theorists, both sociologists and historians, choose to call a global or technological civilization. They base themselves on the technological apparatus that is everywhere prevalent, like the so-called car culture that dominates the lives of people as soon as they become sufficiently affluent to afford a vehicle, or the now equally prevalent computer “literacy.” They point to the economic integration of the world through global production, distribution, and marketing arrangements that enable a cornucopia of consumer goods to be available worldwide. They note the near-universality of law and order and the provisions that have been made to protect human rights from which all individuals benefit. They laud the free circulation of information and the availability of knowledge on any subject whatever, due to the new technologies of communication. This, they say, is what amounts to a technological civilization.

Yet the term “technological civilization” is an oxymoron. Civilization, as we have argued, cannot be based on technology or on any other material and even organizational factors, for it is primarily a matter of culture, that is, of ethics and rationality, linked to high literacy. No amount of sheer material progress of any kind can possibly constitute a civilization. Hence, a situation such as that of the present, where enormous material and organizational progress has taken place, but which is accompanied by a huge decline in culture, can only be called a postcivilizational condition, something that is beyond civilization as we have known it.

In the following discussion we are intent on explaining what has brought about such an unprecedented contradiction between the material and cultural sides of social life. We will focus first on what can be called the primary agencies of de-civilization: totalitarianism, globalization, and colonialism. Before discussing them singly, we will consider

them briefly together. Then we will consider their deeper causes, above all the Forces of Modernity: industrial capitalism, the bureaucratic state, modern science, and technology. The relation between these three forces on the one hand, and totalitarianism, globalization, and colonialism on the other hand, is in fact the crux of our whole account. It is this relation that we hope to make fully explicit by the end of the work. And in the process we hope to explicate the unusual condition in which civilization now finds itself and explain why calling it a “technological civilization” is so misleading.

The three agencies of de-civilization are distinct historical processes, which overlapped during the twentieth century. Colonialism is the oldest, for it took place largely in the nineteenth century and led to the establishment of European empires or spheres of influence in Asia and Africa. Colonialism is different from colonization or what is known as white European settlement of the New World, which took place during the sixteenth century in South America and the seventeenth century in North America, and also much later in Australasia. Colonialism came to an end around the middle of the twentieth century, due largely to the costs and tribulations that the two world wars and the battle against totalitarianism exacted from the main imperial powers, Britain and France, though the liberation movements that arose in the aftermath of their initial defeats, especially at the hands of the Japanese in East Asia, were also decisive. Once victorious, these movements established the states that sought to form a common nonaligned policy and constitute a block of Third World countries—a term that we will, nevertheless, continue to use because it is so well known, even though the global political situation that it reflected in the twentieth century is no longer current.

Totalitarianism began in the Old World, where it had its most devastating impact on civilization, though it also ravaged parts of the Third World as well; only the New World was completely free of it. In Europe it flourished in the period between the two great wars, after which it continued in a somewhat muted form, stripped of radical evil, which we will call sub-totalitarianism. Because of its destructive effect on Western civilization, we will concentrate most of our attention on totalitarianism when dealing with the Old World. The first part of our work will be largely devoted to it.

Totalitarianism, which helped to bring about the end of colonialism, also brought about the conclusion of the European drive for global integration that flourished until the First World War and only really

ceased with the Great Depression and the Second World War. This was the earlier phase of globalization in which Britain played the leading role as the major capitalist and imperialist power during the nineteenth century. The second and much more decisive phase of globalization began after the Second World War under the aegis of the New World, after it had come to the rescue of the Old World and saved Western Europe from totalitarian domination.

America had risen to global prominence during the course of the twentieth century and reached world mastery in all respects in the period after the Second World War. It then set about establishing global organizations to manage the political, economic, social, and cultural affairs of the world: the UN and its agencies, for example, and the IMF, the World Bank, the OECD, and many others. These became the basis of a renewed globalization to which more and more nations adhered as they became modernized and as they abandoned the restrictive anticapitalist policies of Communist totalitarianism and so-called Third World Socialism, especially after the death of Mao in China and the collapse of the Soviet regime in Russia. At present America still stands at the head of this drive to globalization, so much so that for most intents and purposes globalization and Americanization are almost synonymous.

However, it must be stressed that by the term “Americanization” we do not mean the full extent and scope of American civilization, which we will discuss in part II, but only those aspects of it that are readily transmissible to other countries, especially though not exclusively those of the Third World, since all countries have become to some extent Americanized, even the European ones. Americanization largely concerns the Forces of Modernity in their American version: free-market capitalism, the liberal-democratic state, Big Science, and high-tech technology. These have become ubiquitous and all pervasive; the global integration of the world is based on them.

Totalitarianism, globalization, and colonialism might have overlapped historically, but they were not causally connected to each other; the one did not bring about any of the others. However, they did influence each other indirectly in all kinds of subtle ways. As we have already stated, the battle against totalitarianism promoted de-colonialization in many different respects; not the least of these was American foreign policy, which was designed to counter Communist totalitarian inroads into the old colonial empires, by pressing for the liberation of the native peoples in order to free the European powers

from their colonial burdens and enable them to concentrate their forces on the Cold War challenge in Europe. American action during the Suez war, conducted by France and Britain against Nasser in Egypt, provides the prime example of the implementation of this policy. At the same time it is clear that colonialism was by no means the unmitigated evil its opponents and detractors now present it as, for without it globalization as we now know it could not have taken place. Undoubtedly it had a harmful effect on native peoples and their traditional cultures and civilizations, but at the same time it constituted the first phase of modernization, without which the development of modern states and economies—though not yet societies—in the Third World would have been impossible.

Colonialism did not cause totalitarianism, though Hannah Arendt implied a causal relation by presenting imperialism as a precursor to totalitarianism, as if the latter somehow grew out of the former.¹³ But this was not the case. As we will show, totalitarianism had a quite different causal origin to do with the First World War. Nevertheless, in many respects colonialism influenced and prepared the way for totalitarianism. This is especially evident in the case of Italian Fascism and German Nazism. Mussolini's belated drive for empire in Africa led directly to his attempt to conquer independent nations and establish colonial possessions in the Adriatic region, namely in Europe itself. Hitler was forthright about his plans to colonize Eastern Europe up to the Urals; he set out these plans in *Mein Kampf* and implemented them in the Second World War. He drew his inspiration from the British Empire in India, declaring that "what India was to England, the territories of Russia will be for us."¹⁴ It is also likely that the German policy of treating certain Slavs (by no means all, for the Nazis practiced no consistency in racial matters) as subhumans was also inspired by the way blacks were treated in some African colonies, most notoriously in the Belgian Congo and in German South-West Africa. After the revolt of the Hereros, the governor there issued a *Vernichtungsbefehl*, stating that "every Herero, whether found with or without a rifle, with or without cattle, will be shot."¹⁵ This declaration was a foretaste of the extermination policies practiced later in the East. However, one must not exaggerate such influences; the Bolsheviks, who had no such colonial racist models, were equally adept at extermination, most frequently of their own people, rather than vanquished foreigners.

Finally, and perhaps improbably, there is some evidence that totalitarianism had an indirect bearing on subsequent globalization.

The traumatic effect of the totalitarian experience had the predictable consequence of breaking down nationalistic ideologies and encouraging countries to open themselves up to global influences. This is most evident in the two nations that suffered calamitous defeats in the Second World War, Germany and Japan. The willingness of so many states to surrender a considerable degree of sovereignty to world entities, as well as to integrate themselves into larger units of agglomeration, came as a reaction to their negative experiences under totalitarianism. Without this, it is doubtful whether the European Union would have been constituted as soon as it was; that in itself is a move beyond the nation-state. The willingness of China after Mao and of Russia after Gorbachev to join an American-dominated global system is certainly due to the immense failures they experienced with their respective Communist regimes.

Unfortunately, the harm that totalitarianism did to civilization was beyond repair. There is no doubt that totalitarianism was the most damaging agency of civilization ever encountered in history. It far exceeded that wrought by barbarians in past ages—and this is another reason why Hobsbawm's term "barbarization" for the history of the twentieth century is such a misnomer. Something much more insidious took place. Totalitarianism attacked civilization in a way that no outside barbarians could ever have done, for this was an assault on civilization from within civilization itself, against which civilization was almost helpless to defend itself.

In the first place, as Hobsbawm avers, the totalitarians were bent on destroying the late Western civilization of the Enlightenment that had flourish so prolifically before 1914 in Europe and America, and promised to spread gradually to all other parts of the world. This was the culture of liberal-democracy, of the rule of law, of human rights and individualism, of civility in personal bearing and relationships, of humanistic education, of religious freedom and the separation of church and state, of high literacy and a cultivation of the arts, and of intellectual and scientific pursuits, based on the university as an independent institution. It was precisely this civilization that both the far Left and the far Right types of totalitarianism set themselves to destroy, declaring it to be merely bourgeois. And the bourgeoisie was what they most detested and strove to eradicate. Hence, they negated and sought to overturn every one of the previously mentioned features. Of course, the way the Bolsheviks did this was different from the way the Nazis set about it, but the effect was similar. The Bolsheviks began with the

burning of churches and the Nazis with the burning of books, but in no time both turned to the burning of people. Radical evil became their common predilection.

Once they embarked on radical evil, they did more than impugn the Enlightenment values of Western civilization; the very basis of that civilization itself was overturned. Judeo-Christian morality was assailed, first by the Bolsheviks because it was Christian and therefore the religious opium of the people, and then by the Nazis because it was Jewish and therefore racially tainted. Instead, what is right and good was to be judged exclusively by the interests of the Revolution and the proletariat or the Party or the *Volksgemeinschaft*. The rule of law—which the West had inherited from the Greeks and Romans, and developed further in a unique fashion—was dismissed as mere juristic formalism. Instead, the ukase of the Leader or the will of the *Führer* had the force of law. The Greek heritage of philosophical rationality and scientific truth was also suborned by being made subject to political requirements. All philosophies that went against the prevailing ideologies were banned, and all scientific theories that departed from them or were propounded by the wrong people were also rejected. Thus Mendelian genetics in the one case and Einsteinian physics in the other were declared anathema. After all these travesties, what could remain of rationality or civilization in general?

Colonialism was nowhere near as virulently destructive as totalitarianism, but it, too, was harmful to civilization—in this case not so much Western civilization as those of non-European peoples. Most of these civilizations were already in decline when the European colonialists arrived, but they were never given a chance to recover. The Europeans tended to view all other civilizations as inferior to their own and to treat them as relics of a bygone age and a more primitive stage of development. This conclusion followed from theories of development or social evolution, buttressed by Social Darwinism and usually accompanied by some degree of racism, both of which were invoked during the late nineteenth-century colonial period. It is true that there were also tendencies in the opposite direction in favor of the original and primeval, extolling the perennial wisdom of the East, for example, or the high spirituality of Eastern religions, or the more refined beauty of oriental art, or the primitive expressiveness of the arts of Africa; however, such attitudes were only to be found among a minority of sympathetically inclined orientalist or modernist artists, or other connoisseurs of the non-European exotic. Most Westerners

believed that other civilizations had little to offer the West, and they numbered among them such great minds as Hegel, Marx, and Mill, the latter himself a colonial administrator.

Colonialism did not act against other civilizations by forcibly eliminating or repressing them; on the contrary, the colonial authorities were usually indulgent to native traditions and beliefs, except for those that really deserved to be abolished, such as widow-burning in India or foot-binding in China. Rather, they demeaned them in the eyes of their own exponents, the natives themselves, by demonstrating in so many seemingly irrefutable ways that Western civilization was superior. As a result, those who could afford it, usually members of the elite, sought a Western education for themselves and their children. It was precisely those educated in this way, frequently in the home countries of the colonialists, who became the leading advocates for national independence and, where necessary, fighters for liberation from the colonial yoke. It is owing to such people that Third World countries acquired Western ideologies—preeminently in the opposed forms of liberalism and Marxism—and Western modes of government, whether democratic or Socialist; and it is thanks to them that Third World countries became, at least to some degree, imbued with Western forms of culture. But in this respect they were continuing the *mission civilizatrice* that the Western powers at their most enlightened undertook.

It is this Europeanization of the Third World, usually called “modernization,” that made globalization possible. Only countries that were sufficiently modernized are capable of joining the systems of world order that govern the economy, politics, knowledge, education, culture, and other aspects of global society. Countries that have not yet caught up with these developments remain on the periphery of such world systems. Globalization brings to the whole world the Forces of Modernity—namely, industrial capitalism, the bureaucratic state, science, and technology—that the West developed over the last five centuries. At present these institutions are being disseminated in their latest form, the one devised in America and conveyed to the rest of the world via American initiatives such as the Marshall Plan or the numerous other projects it undertook in other regions of the world when its dominance in all these respects became so pronounced. This was when Europe itself was, so to speak, Americanized.

It is not yet clear what the full effects of globalization will be for civilization, but already the signs are ominous. Globalization furthers the material and organizational aspect of civilization at the expense of

all others—the cultural, moral, intellectual, and spiritual ones. It allows the latter to function only insofar as they are adjuncts to the former. Thus, for example, it promotes a culture of media and advertising that is consonant with the marketing needs of industrial capitalism, but this makes for global culture to the detriment of every type of local culture.¹⁶ This is clearly a de-civilizing propensity, but one that is different from any that has ever occurred before. It has nothing in common with barbarism in the anthropological sense, though it results in cultural manifestations that are so crude and primitive they merit being called barbaric in a looser sense.

Thus we are confronted with an overwhelming civilizational paradox: in the midst of unprecedented material affluence and organizational efficiency, utilizing the most advanced technologies and the most up-to-date scientific knowledge—in the midst, that is, of progress in that narrow sense—we are at the same time sinking into a cultural, moral, intellectual, and spiritual decline that is also unprecedented.¹⁷ How did civilization become both so advanced and so debased? This book sets out to explain the historical origins of this condition, more properly called “postcivilization,” in the violently contradictory processes of the twentieth century.

Notes

1. See Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of our Nature, The Decline of Violence in History and its Causes* (Allen Lane, London, 2011), p. 200.
2. See Steven E. Ambrose, “D-Day Fails”, in Robert Cowley (ed.), *The Collected What If? Eminent Historians Imagine What Might Have Been* (Putnam, New York, 2001), p. 347.
3. Eric Hobsbawm, “Barbarism: A User’s Guide”, in *On History* (The New Press, New York, 1997), p. 254.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 253.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 259.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 256.
7. See Harry Redner, *Beyond Civilization: Society, Culture, and the Individual in the Age of Globalization* (Transaction Publishers, Piscataway, NJ, 2013).
8. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
9. See Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, trans. Michael Bullock (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1953).
10. See Harry Redner, *Ethical Life: The Past and Present of Ethical Cultures* (Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 2001).
11. See Harry Redner, *A New Science of Representation: Towards an Integrated Theory of Representation in Science, Politics, and Arts* (Westview, Boulder, 1994).
12. See Benjamin Barber, *Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole* (Norton, New York, 2007).

13. See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Allen and Unwin, London, 1967).
14. Quoted in Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (Penguin, London, 2003), p. 334.
15. Ibid., p. 296.
16. See Harry Redner, *Conserving Cultures: Technology, Globalization, and the Future of Local Cultures* (Roman and Littlefield, Lanham, 2004).
17. See Harry Redner, *Beyond Civilization*, op. cit.